



Trooper

Jesse R. "Roger" Jenkins

Badge #474

10-42 ... October 14, 1969

Jesse "Roger" Jenkins was born November 5, 1939, in Belgrade, MO, in Washington County, the second of three children to Marvin and Alma Jenkins. Marvin and Alma Jenkins would divorce and "Roger" would end up with four half brothers and three half sisters. He was raised in Elvins, MO, and graduated from Elvins High School in May 1958. Elvins would many years later become part of the consolidated community of Park Hills, and Elvins High School became Park Hills High School. Jenkins was an excellent artist who loved to draw pencil or colored chalk sketches of airplanes and outdoor scenes. He was also a talented singer who sang throughout his life in the church choir.

At a "teen town" dance in Elvins, where he worked, Jenkins met Janet Elaine Skaggs who attended nearby Desloge High School. Janet was dancing with someone else when Jenkins decided he would sit at her table with her friends until she finished, so he could meet her. Janet was impressed with his "pretty smile and how cute he was," and they were married on September 13, 1958, in St. Louis, MO, at the First Baptist Church off St. Louis Avenue. Three sons were born to the union: Jeffery Roger on July 31, 1960, Steven Burnell on March 25,

1962, and Bruce Wayne on August 16, 1965.

Early in their marriage, while they lived in Desloge, Jenkins worked first at the Easton Boot and Shoe Company, then McDonnell-Douglas, and finally at Wagner Electric in St. Louis. Janet Jenkins worked at US Tool Grinding in Desloge for two years before she entered nursing school at Mineral Area Community College in Flat River, where she earned her LPN degree.

The Jenkins' second son, Steven, survived less than a month. He died April 20, 1962, as a result of hyaline membrane disease, which is a respiratory affliction in newborn infants. Bruce Jenkins was 19 months old when he contacted measles and developed pneumonia. As a result of these diseases Bruce was stricken with encephalitis, which caused permanent mental capacity challenges. Despite Bruce Jenkins' impaired condition, he and his father were always able to maintain a special bond.

"Roger" Jenkins enjoyed life, was always upbeat, and loved to play practical jokes on family and friends. He was described as a "neat nick" who was fastidious in his preparation even to the point of ironing the cuffs of long sleeve shirts that he wore rolled up. His 1965 cream-colored Chevrolet was always clean and waxed. In the blended family in which he was raised, he was viewed by the other siblings as a mature influence who was more like a father figure, than brother. He was someone who never shied away

from any work detail within or outside the home. "Roger" enjoyed the outdoors, particularly fishing, and loved to hunt squirrels and rabbits with his oldest son, Jeffery.

On October 1, 1967, Jesse Roger Jenkins began his career with the Missouri State Highway Patrol when he entered the Academy in the former Trachoma State Hospital in Rolla.

Throughout his life Jenkins had always gone by his middle name of Roger. Apparently, during his tenure in the Academy, the Patrol decided he was "Jesse" As a result, he became known as Jesse to those in and around the Patrol, but he remained Roger to family and longtime friends. He graduated from the Academy on December 22, 1967, and was assigned to Montgomery City in Troop F where he began his duties on January 1, 1968.



Roommates: Recruits Ed Hurter, Melvin LaForce, John Jones, Terry Schell, Brian Slater, and Jesse Jenkins attended the Patrol's Academy together.

Trooper Jenkins loved the Patrol from the outset and particularly loved to contact the public. His field training officer was Corporal Sterling L. Green. Janet and the two Jenkins boys remained in Desloge while Janet completed her nursing degree. Tpr. Jenkins rented a room in Montgomery City until his family could join him. His monthly probationary report for March 1968 read in part, "He appears to be able to absorb new



Recruit Jenkins is pictured with his classmates at the Academy.

things and has a good recollection of cases we have made. He is not completely settled as he is living by himself and does have his family on his mind. He should shape up real good when his family moves to Montgomery City with him.” Within a few months, Tpr. Jenkins’ young family joined him in Montgomery City.

On one occasion, Tpr. Jenkins investigated a serious accident in which a couple was critically injured. Tpr. Jenkins remained with the wife and held her head until ambulance personnel could transport her from the scene to the hospital in Hermann. Tpr. Jenkins responded to the hospital to check on the lady only to discover that she had died from her injuries. The husband later penned a heartfelt letter of thanks for Tpr.

Jenkins’ efforts and compassion.

On August 16, 1969, Tpr. Jenkins submitted an address change as they had purchased a home at 801 West 6th Street in Montgomery City. Janet Jenkins worked part-time in Montgomery City for a local doctor for a short time before she elected to stay home to provide the necessary hands-on care Bruce required.

The weekend of October 11 and 12, Tpr. Jenkins and his wife were able to spend their time planting grass seed at their new residence. Jeffery had strict instructions not to walk in the yard following his parents’ seeding efforts. His restriction was made even more difficult by the presence of a pristine arrowhead he spotted, which had turned up during the yard improvement process.



⌚ This photo of newly married Mr. And Mrs. J. Roger Jenkins was taken at a wedding shower.



☺ J. Roger Jenkins enjoyed spending time with sons, Jeff and Bruce.

During the early morning hours of Tuesday, October 14, 1969, two men from St. Louis were arrested in the act of burglarizing Cleeton’s Radio and TV Service located at 308 North Allen Street, Montgomery City. Seven television sets were recovered behind the business during the course of the on-scene investigation. Later that day both men, Robert Melvin Thomas and Carl Edward Williams, were charged with burglary and stealing and arraigned. During arraignment, Thomas’ bond was set at \$ 4,000 and Williams’ bond was set at \$7,500. Thomas had been released from prison on parole on February 25, 1969, for a burglary and stealing conviction. Carl Edward Williams had an extensive criminal background.



J. Roger smiles with his brothers-in law and father-in-law in this photo: (l to r) Nick Skaggs, J. Roger Jenkins, Tim Skaggs, and Newt Skaggs.

Once returned to the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office, the prisoners were held in the office area, which was shared with the Missouri State Highway Patrol. Carl Edward Williams was seated next to the desk occupied by Tpr. Jenkins. Robert Melvin Thomas was seated next to a desk across the room with the Montgomery County Sheriff Clarence Landrum. The Montgomery City Marshal Marion Britt and Montgomery County Deputy Sheriff Virgil "Dick" May were at a desk near the Sheriff's Department's radio console while Deputy May was talking on the radio to another department. Sheriff Landrum was advised he had a telephone call and when he reached across the desk to pick up the phone, Robert Melvin Thomas removed the sheriff's five shot revolver from its holster, stood up, and ordered the officers to stand still.

Tpr. Jenkins stood up from his desk and he and Thomas immediately engaged in an exchange of gunfire in which both of them emptied their weapons. Tpr. Jenkins fell beside his desk as Thomas fled from the office and up a flight of stairs. Tpr. Jenkins got up and moved out the doorway where he collapsed. The

deputy and city marshal pursued Thomas out the door and up the stairway while the other prisoner remained in his seat near the desk previously occupied by Tpr. Jenkins. Sheriff Landrum remained with Tpr. Jenkins. Robert Melvin Thomas collapsed on the steps and was handcuffed by the city marshal and deputy. Robert Melvin Thomas died on the stairway from the gunshot wounds inflicted by Tpr. Jenkins, who, in spite of being mortally wounded himself, continued in his effort to apprehend Thomas. Tpr. Jenkins was the eighth member of the Missouri State Highway Patrol to make the ultimate sacrifice and the first in 14 years. He was 29 years old.

While en route to her Tuesday bowling league Janet Jenkins noticed a patrol car approaching. The officer signaled to Janet to pull over. She saw Corporal Sterling Green and his wife, Mary, exit the patrol car and she knew instantly "Roger was gone." Janet described the experience as a "total nightmare". She was taken to a local doctor's office, but refused treatment for her hysteria.

After a short period of time, she realized her sons were at home under the care of Corporal Green's daughter, who

was babysitting, and they needed her to tell them the terrible truth. Young Jeffery knew something was in the air due to the influx of visitors at the residence. When his mother arrived at home he knew from looking at the tears in her eyes something had happened to his dad. Janet Jenkins took Jeffery into a back room of the residence where she told him the news neither of them could bare to believe. Bruce, having only days before had major surgery, was too young to comprehend the commotion or gravity of the situation. Mrs. Jenkins' and her two sons' lives were changed forever.

Cpl. Green had just arrived home from work that fateful day when the sheriff's wife called the residence and told him that Tpr. Jenkins had been shot and was in bad shape. Cpl. Green immediately drove the short distance to the sheriff's office only to discover his young associate had been killed. Shortly thereafter, he realized he had to notify Janet Jenkins before she discovered the news from some other source within the community as the news of Tpr. Jenkins' demise traveled rapidly.

Tpr. Jenkins' body was taken to the Schlanker Funeral Home in Montgomery City prior to his transfer to the Boyer Funeral Home in Desloge. The funeral was held on Friday, October 17, at the Parkview Free Will Baptist Church where Tpr. Jenkins and Janet were members. Due to the limited space in the small church the Patrol suggested a limit for officers attending from each troop from a maximum in Troop F of 15 to a minimum of two in Troops G and I. Despite the suggested limitations there was a huge outpouring of support from officers as the funeral procession stretched for a great distance. The Reverend John Rider, a retired minister and longtime friend of the family, delivered the service and eulogy. The members of Tpr. Jenkins' zone served as pallbearers, including his field-training officer Cpl. Green.

Jeffery Jenkins was sitting in the car waiting for the funeral procession to begin the trek to the cemetery, looking down at his shoes, when Gene Nettles who was a close friend of Tpr. Jenkins opened the car door. Mr. Nettles told Jeffery, "Hold your head up and be proud of your dad." Tpr. Jenkins was laid to rest in St. Francois Memorial Cemetery in Desloge.

Among the many letters of condolences sent to Janet Jenkins,

Tpr. Jesse R. "Roger" Jenkins stands proudly next to his first patrol car in 1969.



was one dated October 15, 1969. It read, in part, "I did not personally know your husband, but he had to be a fine man to wear the uniform of the Missouri State Highway Patrol ... Tell your children, Jeffery and Bruce, to speak with pride of their father's profession and of their father. They can grow to adulthood knowing that because of men like Tpr. Jenkins this country will survive." This letter was sent by then-Kansas City Chief of Police Clarence M. Kelley, who would later go on to become director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Carl Edward Williams was eventually sentenced to a five-year prison term for his part in the burglary of Cleeton's Radio and TV Service. The post-shooting investigation revealed that Williams remained seated during the shooting.

Janet Jenkins knew she needed to return to the Desloge area following her husband's death. By the following June, she and her two sons had moved back. Workers' compensation and insurance assisted in bridging the gap financially for the young family as they struggled to repair their lives. Janet Jenkins' father, Newton Skaggs, worked hard to fill the void left in the Jenkins' boys' lives. Janet worked at Sears Roebuck and Company in Flat River for three years. Janet, Jeffery, and Bruce moved to Jefferson City during Jeffery's freshman year of high school, while Janet worked for Sears there. The move created added hardship on the family and they moved back to Bonne Terre shortly thereafter. Janet Jenkins left Sears when she left Jefferson City.

Shortly after returning to Bonne Terre it was discovered that Bruce Jenkins suffered from kidney disease. It would eventually take his life on December 23, 1987. He was buried next to his father.

Ironically, on October 14, 1982, Sergeant Sterling Green, Tpr. Jenkins' field training officer and the officer who notified Janet of her husband's death, passed away unexpectedly while off-duty. Sgt. Green's son, Tpr. Daniel Green, was attending the Troop A meeting when he was informed of his father's passing.

Janet managed apartment projects from her home, and eventually an office, for approximately 10 years. She then managed the Desloge Senior Apartments for approximately seven years before retiring in 2003. Janet also served as secretary for the St. Francois County Board of the Developmentally Disabled. She serves as a volunteer at the Park Hills Senior Nutrition Center, and volunteers as an instructor for senior water aerobics at the Desloge City Pool. She is an active member of the First Baptist Church of Desloge, and remains on the board for the Desloge Senior Apartments.

Jeffery resides in Desloge. He went on to work for Laclede Gas Company in St. Louis and became assistant superintendent for the Central District. Jeffery had three children, Justin Roger, James Kyle, and Jessica "Jessie" Lynn Jenkins. Justin works for the Alton and Southern Railway in St. Louis, and has a son, Brendon Andrew, born November 7, 2003. Tpr. Jenkins had dark black hair, as did each of his sons. The Jenkins' great-grandson, Brendon, broke that mold and sports rich, blond hair. James is an industrial welder for Metro East in St. Louis and works in the rail car shop. Jessica attends North County High School in the Bonne Terre-Desloge area.

Janet never remarried and has insured that her children and grandchildren appreciate Roger's memory. Janet stated, "We talk about their grandpa and Jeff's dad. I don't want them to forget what a brave man he was and what a great father

he was and what a great grandfather he would have been. Roger died a hero. There were other officers in that room and there would have been more dead if he had not done what he did.”

Another Missouri state trooper did not lose his life again to gunfire until March 1985, when Trooper James Froemsdorf was shot and killed on Interstate 55 in Perry County near the Desloge area. The passing of time did little to ease the pain for Janet. When she learned of Tpr. Froemsdorf’s death, the feelings of loss from her husband’s heroic deed came flooding back.

On Friday, September 3, 2004, the section of U.S. Highway 67 between Desloge and Bonne Terre was dedicated and designated the Trooper Jesse R. Jenkins Memorial Highway with Janet and Jeffery present at the ceremony. The St. Francois Memorial Cemetery is located west of

U.S. 67 approximately at the halfway point of the dedicated highway.

Jeffrey remembers his father as, “a good dad who drug me through the woods when I was a little kid. I’m proud that he did what he did, and he did what he wanted to do.” The arrowhead that was lying in the Jenkins yard when Jeffery was told to stay out of the yard remains in his possession today.

(Lt. James P. Ripley, Troop A, researched and wrote this profile in 2005.

Lt. Ripley plans to write in-depth profiles about every fallen hero of the Patrol. Thank you, Lt. Ripley, for sharing the ones you’ve completed thus far.)



Mr. Jeff Jenkins and Mrs. Janet Jenkins stand with Lt. Lee Ann Kenley near the highway sign that would be placed in memory of their father and husband, Tpr. Jesse R. Jenkins.